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ABSTRACT

Between 1986 and 1996, the number of black women aged 16 and over in the United States increased from 11 million to 13 million. Labor force participation for black women rose during that time from 56.9 percent to 60.4 percent. In 1996 the total labor force population of black women was 7.9 million. Of these, 80 percent worked full time. Black women continue to experience double-digit unemployment, with black teenagers four times more likely to be unemployed than older women. Black women are clustered in significant numbers only in the occupations of managerial and professional specialty; technical, sales, and administrative support; and service. More and more black women continue to enter the higher paying managerial and professional specialty occupations, such as registered nurses, teachers, social workers, and managers. In addition, many black women are becoming business owners. Twenty-five percent of black women had less than a high school education; 34 percent had a high school education; 19 percent, some college; 7 percent, associate degree; and 15 percent, college degree. Black women have made great progress in improving their economic status over the past decade, but they still earned less than similarly employed black men, white men, and white women. (KC)

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Facts on Working Women

U.S. Department of Labor
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BLACK WOMEN IN THE LABOR FORCE

Between 1986 and 1996 the number of black women 16 years of age and over in the United States increased by 2.0 million--this represents an 18 percent increase from 11.0 million to 13.0 million. Every major age group experienced population gains, however, the 20 to 24 subgroup declined slightly (see Table 1). The parents of these young adults are part of the "baby boom" generation--persons born between 1946 and 1964. Baby boomers, in general, are having fewer children than the previous generation and many delay having children until later years, thus spreading their childbirths over a longer period of time. Consequently, many children with baby boomers as parents have not yet reached their teenage years. These reasons help account for some of the decline in the 20 to 24 age group. The median age of black women in July 1995 was 30.4 years.

Table 1
Population of Black Women in 1986 and 1996
(numbers in thousands)

Age	1986	1996
16 and over	11,033	13,029
16 to 24 years	2,518	2,559
16 to 19 years	1,088	1,195
20 to 24 years	**1,430**	**1,364**
25 to 34 years	2,762	2,938
35 to 44 years	1,893	2,877
45 to 54 years	1,341	1,874
55 to 64 years	1,145	1,196
65 years and over	1,374	1,584

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment and Unemployment, January 1987 and 1997.

Labor force participation for black women rose between 1986 and 1996--from 56.9 percent to 60.4 percent. Since 1987 their rate has not dropped below 57 percent (see Table 2). Historically, black women have had much higher participation rates than white or Hispanic women. Over the past decade, however, white women have almost eliminated this gap. For example, in 1996 black women participated at a rate of 60.4 percent and white women participated at 59.1 percent. Labor force projections for the year 2005 show that black women's participation rate will be slightly lower than that of white women--58.8 percent and 62.6 percent, respectively. Hispanic women continued to have a lower participation rate than black or white women (53.4 percent in 1996) and a projected rate of 53.6 percent in 2005.

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Between 1986 and 1996, 1.6 million black women entered the labor force bringing the 1996 total to 7.9 million. In 1996 they achieved their highest ever labor force participation rate--60.4 percent. The latest Bureau of Labor Statistics' projections show that 9 million black women will be labor force participants in 2005.

Table 2
Employment Status of the Noninstitutional Population of Black Women, 1986-1996
(numbers in thousands)

Year	Civilian Noninstitutional Population	In Labor Force	Percent of Population	Employed	Unemployed Number	Unemployed Percent	Not In Labor Force
1986	11,033	6,281	56.9	5,386	894	14.2	4,752
1987	11,224	6,507	58.0	5,648	858	13.2	4,717
1988	11,402	6,609	58.0	5,834	776	11.7	4,793
1989	11,582	6,796	58.7	6,025	772	11.4	4,786
1990	11,733	6,785	57.8	6,051	734	10.8	4,948
1991	11,898	6,788	57.0	5,983	805	11.9	5,110
1992	12,069	6,999	58.0	6,087	912	13.0	5,070
1993	12,251	7,031	57.4	6,189	842	12.0	5,220
1994	12,621	7,413	58.7	6,595	818	11.0	5,208
1995	12,835	7,634	59.5	6,857	777	10.2	5,201
1996	13,029	7,869	60.4	7,086	784	10.0	5,159

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Earnings, January 1987-1997.*

EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Slightly more than half of all black women age 16 and over worked in 1996--approximately eight million. Nearly two million more worked in 1996 than in 1986 (see Table 2). Until 1988 the number of working black women trailed the number of employed black men. Since that time, however, black women have accounted for at least half of total black employment--52.3 percent in 1996.

Black women are more inclined to work full time than are white women. In 1996, eight out of every ten employed black women worked **full time**--at least 35 hours per week. The same was true for only seven of every ten white women. Just as full-time employment has risen for black women, part-time employment has also increased--from 1.1 million in 1986 to 1.3 million in 1996. One major reason for this increase in part-time employment results from a rise in contingent work brought on by "downsizing" or "right sizing" in the public sector and private American business community. **Contingent work** generally implies something other than a standard 8-hour-day, 5-day-work week--temporary work, shift work, part-time work, self-employment, and home-based work.

With companies wanting to gain greater control of their labor costs by quickly adjusting the size of their work forces, many permanent, full-time employees have been let go and replaced with temporary, contract, or part-time workers whose pay is usually lower and whose benefits are substantially reduced or nonexistent.

Double digit unemployment continues to hinder black women even though their rates have continued to decline moderately since 1986 **(see Table 3)**. Black teenagers (female and male ages 16-19) experienced unemployment rates as high as 30.3 and 36.9 percent, respectively. As late as 1996, teenage black women were **four** times as likely to be unemployed as those between the ages of 35 and 44 **(see Table 4)**. Black women (ages 40 and over) displayed unemployment rates equal to or lower than the average for all women.

Throughout the mid and late 1980s, the number of black women that were not in the labor force remained fairly constant at about 4.7 million. Since that time the number has risen to 5.2 million in 1996 **(see Table 2)**. Feeling the effects of the July 1990 to March 1991 recession, the number of black women outside the labor force peaked at 5.2 million in 1993. Since that time, these numbers have been slowly but steadily declining.

Table 3
Unemployment Rates of Black Women and Men, ages 16 and over, 1986-1996

Year	Women	Men
1986	14.2	14.8
1987	13.2	12.7
1988	11.7	11.7
1989	11.4	11.5
1990	10.8	11.8
1991	11.9	12.9
1992	13.0	15.2
1993	12.0	13.8
1994	11.0	12.0
1995	10.2	10.6
1996	10.0	11.1

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Earnings*, January 1987-1997.

Table 4
Unemployment Rates of Black Women and Men by Selected Age Groups, 1996

Age Groups	Women	Men
16 to 19 years	**30.3**	**36.9**
20 to 24	18.4	19.2
25 to 34	11.0	10.1
25 to 29	12.2	11.4
30 to 34	9.9	8.9
35 to 44	6.9	7.8
45 to 54	3.8	6.3
55 to 64	3.8	5.2
65 and over	5.6	5.0

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Earnings*, January 1997.

OCCUPATIONAL EMPLOYMENT

Of the six major occupational groups--managerial and professional specialty; technical, sales, and administrative support; service; precision production, craft, and repair; operators, fabricators, and laborers; and farming, forestry, and fishing--black women are only significantly represented in the first three groups, respectively. The ten leading occupations for black women are also all within these three groups **(see Table 5)**.

More and more black women continue to enter the higher paying, career-oriented **managerial and professional specialty occupations**--a 79 percent increase from 900,000 in 1986 to 1.6 million in 1996. These jobs require substantial levels of educational attainment. Consequently, this group also has the highest proportion of workers with college degrees and workers with the highest earnings when compared to other occupational groups. Fringe benefits such as comprehensive health coverage, retirement plans, and paid vacations are some of the advantages usually associated with this group.

In 1996 black female professionals were employed mostly as registered nurses, elementary school teachers, social workers, managers and administrators, not elsewhere cited, accountants and auditors, and pre-kindergarten/kindergarten teachers. Median weekly earnings for full-time women workers in managerial and professional specialty jobs ranged from $314 for recreation workers to $958 for lawyers and judges in 1996.

Table 5
Ten Leading Occupations for Employed Black Women, 1996
(numbers in thousands)

	Occupation	Employed
1.	Nursing aides, orderlies, and attendants	536
2.	Cashiers	359
3.	Secretaries	290
4.	Supervisors, personal service occupations	268
5.	Retail sales workers, excluding cashiers	191
6.	Janitors and cleaners	176
7.	Cooks	160
8.	Maids	158
9.	Registered nurses	157
10.	Elementary school teachers	151
10.	Social workers	151

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, unpublished tabulations from the Current Population Survey, 1996 Annual Averages.

The largest number of black women worked in **technical, sales, and administrative support occupations**--2.7 million in 1996. These jobs require training after high school but may not require a 4-year college degree. Generally, they do require some specific formal training, but not to the extent required in most professional specialty jobs.

In 1996 many black women employed in technical, sales, and administrative support jobs worked as cashiers, secretaries, retail sales workers, investigators and adjusters, excluding insurance, and data-entry keyers. Nearly twice as many black women worked in administrative support jobs as in technical and sales jobs combined--1.7 million as compared with 978,000. Unfortunately, many of the sales and administrative support jobs do not offer high wages, are sometimes temporary or contingent in nature, and very rarely offer the full range of fringe benefits (health care coverage, paid vacations, and pension plans) associated with managerial, professional, or technical jobs.

Over the years, large numbers of women of all races have worked in **service occupations**. This has remained true because of the abundance of service jobs, their less demanding skill requirements, and the fact that many service jobs offer flexibility in work hours not generally characteristic in many other occupational groups. These factors also contribute to service workers generally having lower educational attainment and lower earnings.

In 1996, 1.8 million black women worked in service occupations. Six out of ten black female service workers were employed as nursing aides, orderlies, and attendants, janitors and cleaners, cooks, and maids. Nearly all service jobs are dominated by women, excluding those in protective service--police and detectives, guards, and firefighters. These three jobs are part of a larger group known as **nontraditional occupations**--any occupation where women comprise 25 percent or less of the total employed.

Nontraditional service jobs such as police officers and firefighters require extensive training and offer higher earnings and usually more benefits than other service occupations. Even though female police and detectives had median weekly earnings of $511 in 1996, only 26 percent (41,000 of 151,000 women) were black; in addition, only 20 percent (1,000 of 5,000 women) were working in firefighting and fire prevention occupations in 1996.

Collectively, less than 1 million black women were employed within the three remaining major occupational groups--**precision production, craft, and repair; operators, fabricators, and laborers; and farming, forestry, and fishing**. Even though many of the precision production, craft, and repair jobs have higher than average earnings, women in general, do not readily gravitate towards these jobs. Black women working in these three groups are usually assemblers, textile sewing machine operators, miscellaneous machine operators, bus drivers, and production inspectors, checkers, and examiners. Many of these jobs do not require advanced degrees, but do require several months or years of paid apprenticeship or on-the-job-training before one is fully qualified.

One area where black women have exercised their job options is **business ownership**. Latest data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census[1], showed that black women owned 277,246 firms with receipts totaling $8.5 billion in 1992. Firms owned by black women, however, had the lowest average receipts ($31,000) when compared with other minority business owners. Women owned 45 percent of all black owned businesses and accounted for 26 percent of total sales and receipts. Of all firms owned by black women, 20,913 had 101,116 paid employees and an annual total payroll of $1.4 billion.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The population of black women age 25 and over can be divided into five basic groups according to educational attainment--less than a high school diploma, 25 percent; high school graduate, no college, 34 percent; some college, no degree, 19 percent; associate degree, 7 percent; and college graduate, 15 percent.

The more education one has, the higher the probability that a person will be a labor force participant. This is true for all persons, regardless of sex or race and is more evident among black women than white or Hispanic women. The labor force participation rate for black women ages 25 and over with a high school diploma but no college degree was 64.9 percent in 1996. The comparable figures for white and Hispanic women were 55.4 and 62.8 percent, respectively. This difference also exist when comparing women of the same age group with post secondary degrees (bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees). In 1996 black women who were college graduates participated at a rate of 81.2 percent; 75.0 percent for white women; and 75.6 percent for Hispanic women.

Predictably, educational attainment and unemployment have an inverse relationship--as educational attainment increases, the unemployment rate decreases (**see Table 6**). Black women with less than a high school diploma experienced unemployment in 1996 that was nearly six times as high as those who were college graduates-- 14.2 percent compared with 2.6 percent.

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[1] Data shown are from the booklet Survey of Minority-Owned Business Enterprises--Summary, 1992 Economic Censuses, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. For further information about minority women business owners, contact the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census AGFS/C.B., Iverson Mall, Room 300-15, Washington, DC, 20233 or you may call on (301) 763-5726.

Table 6
Comparison of Black Women's Labor Force Participation Rates and Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment, 1996
(ages 25 years and over)

Level of Education	Labor Force Participation Rate (%)	Unemployment Rate (%)
Total, 25 yrs. and over	62.2	7.4
Less than a high school diploma	30.2	14.2
High school graduates, no college	64.9	8.7
Some college, no degree	76.8	6.5
Associate degree	81.4	5.6
College graduates	81.2	2.6

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, unpublished tabulations from the Current Population Survey, 1996 Annual Averages.

The largest segment of the black female labor force was comprised of women who were high school graduates with no college, 35 percent; with some college, 24 percent; college graduates, 19 percent; with less than a high school diploma, 12 percent; and with an associate degree, 9 percent.

FAMILIES AND MARITAL STATUS

Black families, like all other family groups, have undergone many changes during this century as our population continues to adapt to evolving technologies, economic conditions, and social trends. Three major trends contribute to the changing American family: (1) the decline of the traditional family due to divorce, widowhood (aging), and delayed marriage; (2) the tendency of women to have fewer children and to do so later in life; and (3) shifting of economic roles within the family, particularly the increased labor force participation of wives.

As reported in the Bureau of the Census publication--*Household and Family Characteristics: March 1995*--there were 8.1 million black families in the United States in March 1995, which represented a 19 percent increase from 1985 when there were 6.8 million. Of this 8.1 million, nearly half (46 percent) were families maintained by women, 47 percent were married-couple families, and 7 percent had a male householder, no wife present.

One significant occurrence involving black families since the 1980's has been the growth of families maintained by a single parent (see Table 7). Between 1985 and 1995, families with a male householder, no wife present have increased by 56 percent and families with a female householder, no husband have increased by 25 percent. This increase is the result of increases in marital disruptions and increases in out-of-wedlock childbirths.

Fifty-eight percent of all black families had children under age 18; and families maintained by women were more likely to have children than married-couple families or families maintained by men, no wife present. Comparing all black families--with and without children--those maintained by women were likely to have more children per family than married-couples or families maintained by men, no wife present. When just looking at black families with children, female householders and married-couple families had basically the same number of children per family. In most cases, however, the two parent family has the luxury of dual incomes to cover expenses, while the single parent family with the same number of children must stretch one income and possibly rely on child support payments to cover identical expenses.

Table 7
Number and Type of Black Families,
Selected Years, March 1985, 1990, and 1995
(numbers in thousands)

Family Type	1985	1990	1995
Total Families	6,778	7,470	8,093
Married-couple families	3,469	3,750	3,842
Families maintained by women	**2,964**	**3,275**	**3,716**
Percent of all families	**43.7**	**43.8**	**45.9**
Families maintained by men	344	446	535

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Household and Family Characteristics: March 1985, 1990, and 1995.

Of all black families in 1995, married-couple families continued to have the highest median incomes--$41,307. The median income of black families varied greatly by the labor force status of the wife. When the wife was in the labor force, median family income climbed to $48,533; when the wife was not in the labor force, it was only $25,507. Median family income for female householders with no husband present was a meager $15,004.

A general profile of a black family in 1995 would show a family living in the Southern portion of the U.S. in a metropolitan region of at least 1 million residents. The family could easily be a married couple or one maintained by a women--either family would have 2 to 3 persons in it. The householder was between 25 and 44 years of age and there was a least one earner in the family. Median income was about $26,000.

CONCLUSIONS

Black women have made great progress in improving their economic status over the past decade. Between 1986 and 1996, unemployment declined from 14.2 percent to 10.0 percent; teenage unemployment (ages 16-19) dropped from 39.2 percent to 30.3 percent; total employment grew from 5.4 million to 7.1 million; and employment in the high-paying managerial and professional occupations increased from 900,000 to 1.6 million. Black women continued to have greater labor force attachment than white or Hispanic women at the high school graduate and college graduate levels of educational attainment in 1996. The number of black women who own their own businesses is constantly rising--up to 277,246 in 1992.

Despite these gains, black women, in general, face various stern realities. In 1996 those who worked full time earned 88 percent of similarly employed black men, 85 percent of comparably employed white women, but only 62 percent of what white men earned. Median family income ($25,970) was only 61 percent of what white families earned in 1995. Nearly half (3.7 million or 46 percent) of all black families were maintained by women and 45 percent (1.7 million) of these single parent households were living in poverty in 1995. Black women were nearly three times as likely to live in poverty and twice as likely to be unemployed as white women.

With women and minorities comprising a large segment of tomorrow's labor force entrants, government (federal, state, and local) and the private American business community must learn to satisfy their labor needs by confronting all the obstacles that hinder these persons from becoming a part of the economic mainstream. In turn, the labor force entrants of tomorrow must prepare themselves with the necessary educational training and technical skills in order to take advantage of meaningful and profitable employment opportunities. Why is so important for black women? Projections show that after Hispanic women and men, black women will comprise the largest share of non-white labor force entrants between 1994 and 2005.

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